



Smithsonian

National Portrait Gallery Presents Portrait of Feminist and Scholar Linda Nochlin by Artist Deborah Kass

February 19, 2020 • News Release



Credit: "Orange Disaster (Linda Nochlin)" by Deborah Kass, silkscreen and acrylic on canvas, 1997.
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery will honor trailblazing feminist art historian Linda Nochlin (1931–2017) with the 1997 portrait "Orange Disaster (Linda Nochlin)" by Deborah Kass. The silkscreen and acrylic painting will be displayed on the museum's first-floor presentation wall Wednesday, Feb. 26, in advance of Women's History Month, and will remain on view through fall 2021. Dorothy Moss, curator of painting and sculpture and coordinating curator of the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, helped the museum acquire the work from the artist in 2019.

"Linda Nochlin shook the artistic and academic worlds by identifying the systemic barriers that kept women on the art industry's sidelines," Moss said. "We're thrilled to display this portrait for visitors. There is perhaps no better time than the eve of Women's History Month to present this fitting tribute by Kass to Nochlin's indelible legacy and revolutionary spirit."

Nochlin transformed the study of art history. Her landmark essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) challenged not only the assumptions behind the title question but also decades of accepted methodology in research and teaching. She revealed how, for centuries, institutional and societal structures had denied women artists opportunities for education, achievement and success, regardless of their abilities. Skeptical about approaches that merely involved unearthing forgotten examples of women artists, Nochlin argued forcefully that art historians should address the ways institutions, society and culture had and continued to limit women's participation in the art world. Nochlin's essay and subsequent writings redefined scholarship and bolstered the developing field of feminist studies.

Raised in Brooklyn, Nochlin obtained a bachelor's degree from Vassar College and a master's degree from Columbia University. In 1963, she earned a doctorate in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University with a dissertation on the 19th-century French painter Gustave Courbet. Nochlin was a professor at Vassar from 1963 through 1979 and taught at other renowned colleges and universities before joining the faculty of the Institute of Fine Arts in 1992. She retired in 2013.

When feminist artist Kass delivered a lecture at the Institute of Fine Arts in 1996, Nochlin was in the audience. Kass seized the opportunity to tell Nochlin that she considered her a hero and asked to paint her portrait. For "Orange Disaster (Linda Nochlin)," Kass reinvented Andy Warhol's "Orange Car Crash" (1963) from the series "Death and Disaster." Nochlin sat for multiple photographs in the artist's studio, which the artist screen printed onto the large-scale canvas. Completed in 1997, Kass' portrait celebrates Nochlin as an iconoclast who shattered the foundations of traditional art history.

This presentation is also part of the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, "Because of Her Story." For more information, visit womenshistory.si.edu.

National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery tells the multifaceted story of the United States through the individuals who have shaped American culture. Spanning the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists, whose lives tell the American story.

The National Portrait Gallery is part of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C. Smithsonian information: (202) 633-1000. Connect with the museum at npg.si.edu, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

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